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Bodleian Library, Rawlinson MS D.375: An Historical Puzzle

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quotes in B VI 75-6 in specifying the people he will *not* feed with his labour; but in XV 534 the context is not that of final judgement but of the ascetic way of life. Langland, in a word, is mainly concerned with the hermit's exile from worldly things in the effort to know himself and so become fit to approach God. However, a chief motive for such self-exile is the thought of the Four Last Things – death, judgement, hell and heaven – and Langland could have found the link between asceticism and judgement made in a vivid fashion in ch. III of the *Summa de Arte Praedicatoria*:

*Memorare igitur novissima tui, in libro scientiae, ut te legas in libro experientiae, ut te invenias in libro conscientiae . . .*¹⁰

With that last phrase (my italics), we may compare his exhortation in ch. XXXVI of the same treatise to read 'in libro conscientiae, ut [quisque] cognoscat seipsum'.¹¹ In these two passages we have, I believe, the direct source of B XV 534.

The case for a medieval poet's having used this or that 'source' is generally (and rightly, in my view) to be examined with a measure of scepticism. But I am convinced that there are many passages in the works of Alanus which are closely echoed in the different versions of *Piers Plowman*. The cumulative effect of each piece of evidence is much stronger than that of any one particular example; however, it can be shown beyond reasonable doubt that Langland knew at least the *Liber Parabolarum*, from which he quotes in B XVIII 410a (C XX 453-4) and C IX 265-6. Taken individually, each of the two quotations could be regarded as a proverb in independent circulation; but it is surely beyond coincidence that they should occur *together* in the text of Alanus:

Sub molli pastore cecat lanam lupus: et grex
Incustoditus dilaceratur eo.

Clarior est solito, post nubila plurima (var. maxima, as in
Langland), Phoebus,
Post inimicitias, clarior est et amor.¹²

The *Liber Parabolarum* is not, of course, one of the three works by Alanus to which I have resorted in discussing the line B XV 534; but it is perhaps worth noting here that one of those

works, the *Contra Haereticos*, also contains a passage (II. xvi) which may have given Langland the notion that a sin against conscience will bring a man to hell. In a note on A X 91-4 published in 1967 I traced the Latin quotation *Qui agit contra conscientiam edificat ad gehennam* to Richard of St. Victor's commentary on the *Song of Songs* and to Jean de la Rochelle's *Summa de Vitiis*.¹³ I know no further evidence for Langland's acquaintance with either work, but in Alanus' treatise against the heretics he could have read this:

*. . . quidquid fit contra conscientiam, id intelligitur de mortali peccato, quia si conscientia dictat alicui, aliquod esse peccatum mortale, et tamen facit, seipsum aedificat ad gehennam, et aeterna morte dignum reddit.*¹⁴

Langland does not, like Chaucer (*Parlement of Foules*, 316) mention 'Aleyne' by name; but we have found over twenty passages in *Piers Plowman* that suggest he had read – and read widely – in the writings of the admired and prolific Doctor Universalis, manuscripts of which circulated widely in England. The present note endeavours to shed light on the process by which a religious idea originating in St. Jerome was developed and transmitted by Alanus before finally crystallising into the immortal diamond of Langland's poetry.

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¹³ *N&Q* ccxii. 365-6.

¹⁴ *PL* ccx, 391.

BODLEIAN LIBRARY, RAWLINSON MSS D.375: AN HISTORICAL PUZZLE

IN the catalogue of Rawlinson MSS in the Bodleian Library, under MS D.375, reference is made to a poem preserved on the lower half of p. 216: 'a ballad of complaint, in a northern or Scottish dialect; 55 lines; cent. xv.' The first two and the last three lines are there quoted. The poem is on the verso side of the first of two parchment leaves (pp. 215/6, 217/8) bound in among the mostly paper pages of the manuscript. Despite the catalogue entry the poem appears to have escaped further attention; it

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 118.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 181.

¹² *Ibid.*, 581-2.

seems not to have been printed, nor is it mentioned in any of the indices of ME verse. Since the poem is not without literary merit and since it presents a number of problems, textual, dialectal, historical and even cryptographic, it seems fitting to reproduce it here, even though some of these problems can only be aired rather than resolved.

All abbreviations have been expanded and the expansions italicized. Note, however, that final *r* is often written with a flourish which we have not marked. The letter *þ* is throughout identical in form to the letter *y*. We have therefore printed *y* to represent both functions, as in *myye* line 2.

Bodley Rawlinson D.375 p. 216

- In syfhyng sar I sit vnsauth
& oft mon *murnyng myye*
for .O. is *murrit* mode & mauth
yrouf bale y' berin vnbliye
5 Syne .E. was outh of likyng lauth
In wo I alto wryye
In karis kene sir N is kauth
w' stoundis sharp & styeye.
w' an .O. & an .I. f has dole & drede
10 al yus in langyng laye I. ly
of .O. is rewth to rede.

Vntimeli tit is .t. in tene
Sin .O. was send to sell
N is seldin sekryr sene
15 For .h. I zamer & zell.
al wesenis .T. as *gres on grene*
Or lef for frostis fell
So lang has .E. In baret bene.
bi .R. is nouth to tell.
20 W' an .I. & an .O. O carpe of car
a rewful rede he tok him to
Til faynd of swilk a far

For .E. ful wilsid is mi way
Sin .T. gan fro me found
25 Ane .O. me drethchis nith & day
For .M. I sit vn sound
Ane E. has reft me part of play
yrouf .M. i grone on ground
yir *lettres* sex for soye I say
30 has wrouth me dedis wound
w' an .I. & an O. Ic haue prouid part of pine
Syn I gan found y' frely fro
mith neur mi fonnyng fine.

- Of .S. outh sprang mi syghyng sar
35 Ane v. sal wirk me wele
Of blis has .G. yus beft me bar
Ane .N. mi kar may kele
for .A. I find swilk fremmit far.
& can no frenchepe fele
40 away of werld I wald I war
Bod crist me send *sum cele*
w' an .I. & an .O. al wite I. wickid werd
y' I. in grefe yus *grayyit* go.
yrouf bale so brade on brend
45 Mi name is taul now hend al hale
rith qwo can hit rede
Swilk droui drunk yus dith of dwale
is merkid to mi mede
So sori sedge sene in sale
50 Now left is none in lede
yus dole has delt his dreri dale
for wan of wil I wede
w' an .I. & an .O. qwen fortune wil be fa
yore may no wit ye wile fro wo.
55 qwore euir on ground yow. ga.

Textual notes

Line

- 1 *syfhyng*. The reading of the initial letter is unclear. However, the alliteration demands *s* and the sense is best served by some form of the word 'sighing'. We have retained the reading in spite of its formal eccentricity. Line 34 might suggest that *syfhyng* is an error for *syghyng* but in view of *yrouf* (lines 4, 28, 44) and the modern English dialect forms *sife*, *siff* (see EDD) for 'sigh', it is possible that the reading is genuine.
- 2 *myye*. Probably DOST *myth* v, sense 3 'display, make known'. cf. MED *mythen* v. (2), but this is recorded only once in ME (*Guy* (2) p. 396) and not in the required sense.
- 3 *murrit*. Perhaps error for *merrit*, with wrong abbreviation. But might well be for *murit* 'immured', see MED *muren*, in view of line 13 below.
- 7 *sir*. The MS. probably reads *sir* but with *s* corrected from *f*.
- 13 *sell* = 'cell'. cf. reverse spelling *cele* line 41 for 'sele'.
- 22 *jaynd*. Probably *ppl.* of MED *feinen* v. sense 8(a) 'held back (from)'.
- 23 *wilsid*. Perhaps erroneously for *willid* 'gone astray', OED will v³. cf. York Myst. xxviii. 17.
- 25 *drethchis*. The *t* is clear.
- 38 *fremmit*. MED *fremed* adj. 'hostile, unfriendly'.
- 45 *taul*. Error(?) for *tauld*, *ppl.* of tell 'make known'. OED records *au-* forms only in Scots. cf. *tell* v. A. 3*ß*. *hend*. Probably the adverb. MED *hende*, sense (b) 'skilfully, well'. 'My entire name is now skilfully made known.'

- 47 *drunk*. For this form see OED *drunk* sb¹. But *drink* would be expected in the language of this poem.
 52 *wan of wil*: 'destitute of purpose' or possibly an error for the common alliterating phrase *wil of wan* for which see NED *will* a. 3a.

Dialect

The language of the poem as it survives in Rawlinson is somewhat idiosyncratic. Specifically northern features such as *yir* for 'these' and the common appearance of *a*-spellings for the sound descending from OE *ā*, are counterbalanced by *th*-spellings for [çt] and [xt]: *mith*, *niith*, *rith*, *vnsauth*, *mauth*, *lauth*; such forms are found most commonly in E. Anglia. The combination of these features squares best with the language of east central Lincolnshire. It would be rash, however, to come to any very firm conclusion about its provenance on the basis of the characteristics of so short a text. There are some oddities: *yrouf* 'through' is not recorded from anywhere else in the ME corpus; but for rare ME *purf*, *thurf* see OED *through* prep. and adv. *Av*. But modern northern dialects, and also Lincs., attest *-f* forms frequently, v. EDD *through* prep. and cf. northern and North Midland *thof* 'though' beside more southerly *-gh* forms. *bod* is a rare variant of *bot* 'but, unless', common only in the Durham area; it does however occur sporadically in N. Yorks., W. Yorks., and Northumberland. The poem as it stands is evidently a copy and while the original can scarcely have been composed anywhere south of Lincolnshire, it might have been written almost anywhere in the north.

Cryptogram

To judge by the hand and language, the copy of the poem probably dates from the first third of the 15th century. The author, as so often with ME verse, is anonymous, but in this case the reader is evidently supposed to be able to work out the poet's name from what is in the text itself. However, we cannot number ourselves among those 'rith qwo can hit rede' (see line 46), and this brings us to what seems to be some kind of acrostic. It is not a true acrostic: the letters do not appear as first or last of each line, but separately here and there within the text itself. There is apparently no attempt to disguise which letters make up the puzzle; they appear as isolated entities in the poem and yet

seem themselves to be used as part of its meaning. Lifted from their context, however, they form no obvious pattern. There are 23, or possibly 24, such letters altogether: it is uncertain whether the O in 'O carpe of car' (line 20) should be counted among them or taken merely as part of the exclamation. (The exclusion of the letters in the I and O refrains seems justified not only because of their common use in other ME verse as mere refrain but because of the imbalance of letter frequencies that would result from their inclusion.)¹

The 'acrostic' or cryptogram seems, then, to consist of the following:

Stanza 1	OENFO	5 letters
Stanza 2	TONHTER (and O?)	7 or 8 letters
Stanza 3	ETOMEM	6 letters
Stanza 4	SVGNA	5 letters

In lines 45-6

'mi name is taul now hend al hale
 rith qwo can hit rede'

the poet appears to be telling us that these letters stand for his name. The first simple observation is that the five letters in stanza 4 written backwards spell 'Angus': but if this is a clue, what is to be made of the other letters? If they are merely a cryptogram containing the author's name, does that mean that the poem itself is meaningless? Or may the letters also have individual significance in the contexts in which they appear? In stanza 3 the poet says that the letters ETOMEM are persons or things that have caused him trouble. Yet they can hardly be excluded from the general cryptogram. In contrast, the letters of stanzas 1 and 2 appear to 'be' friends of the poet sharing his distress. There are in fact 'goodies' and 'baddies' of whom stanza 4 contains a mixture. The difficulty is that some letters fall into both categories in different stanzas.

It is possible, of course, that the letters have been encoded in some way. If they form a cipher, the following observations may be made:

¹ Poems with O and I refrains are well-attested from the late 14th and 15th centuries, see Heuser, W., 'With an O and an I', *Anglia* 27 (1903-4), 283-319. See further: Rigg, A. G., *A Glastonbury Miscellany of the Fifteenth Century: A Descriptive Index of Trinity College, Cambridge, MS 0.9.38* (1968).

- (1) Systematic substitutional shifts produce no sensible results. We discount the possibility of some alternative form of substitution of a merely random kind.
- (2) The alternative possibility of some form of transformational cipher is supported by the letters being plausibly 'clear text' letters. A transposition might be formulaic in character or, where so small a number of letters is involved, merely anagrammatic. But all attempts at transformational solutions have failed. However, if the subject of the poem could be associated with some known person it is quite possible that such a clue would open the way to a solution.

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A NEW DATING OF JOHN MIRK'S *FESTIAL*

IN the absence of a list of the priors of the Augustinian monastery at Lilleshall in Shropshire where John Mirk was canon and later prior, there have until now been two criteria by which an approximate dating of the *Festial* has been made. Both were first suggested by Horstmann a century ago. Firstly, 'Ms. Cott. Claud. A II ist c. 1420 geschrieben, nachdem Joh. Mirkus, wie aus der, diesem Namen in der erwähnten Schlussbemerkung hinzugefügten Notiz: cuius anime propitiatur deus, hervorgeht, bereits verstorben war'.¹ Mirk's death by 1420 clearly provides a *terminus ad quem* for the production of the *Festial*, and Horstmann found corroborative evidence of this early fifteenth century dating in a reference in the same manuscript to the celebration of St. Winifred's Day: 'Einen anderen Anhalt für die Zeitbestimmung gibt der Anfang des Sermo de s. Wenefreda, indem es vom Tage dieser Heiligen heisst: Þe wych day is not ordeynyd by holy church to be halowed but þere as men han deuocyon to þis holy madon; nun wurde S. Wenefred's Tag i. J. 1415 zu einem kirchlichen Feste erhoben; das

Festial ist also noch vor diesem Jahre verfasst'.²

Some doubt may, however, be cast on both Horstmann's criteria. In the first place, his dating of MS Cotton Claudius A.II. to 1420 is not now confirmed by either Wakelin ('1425-50')³ or Kristensson ('the second quarter of the 15th century')⁴. Besides, Horstmann himself was aware that, although the 'älteste und beste Hs.',⁵ MS Cotton Claudius 'ist nicht so correct, wie man nach dem Alter des Ms. vermuthen sollte'⁶ and 'steht dem Originalen keineswegs immer am nächsten'.⁷ Thus, although the Cotton MS is probably the oldest extant, it is very little help in anything but the vaguest dating.

Secondly, although in 1415 Henry Chichele, Archbishop of Canterbury, raised the feast of St. Winifred to a higher rank throughout his province⁸, Roger Walden, Archbishop during Thomas Arundel's exile, had already established her feast in the province of Canterbury in 1398.⁹ Quite apart from the evidence of the *Festial* text ('Þe wych day is not ordeynyd . . .'), the sermon's position between St. Barnabas and St. John the Baptist shows that at the time the *Festial* was written the 1398 official commemoration for 3 November had not superseded the unofficial commemoration for 22 June.¹⁰

It would seem, then, that the composition of the *Festial* should be dated rather earlier than hitherto.¹¹ This is now confirmed by a previously unnoticed reference in the *Festial* sermon for Quinquagesima Sunday, a sermon which begins in much the same way in all the extant manuscripts:

² Ibid.

³ M. F. Wakelin, 'The Manuscripts of John Mirk's *Festial*', *Leeds Studies in English*, n.s. 1 (1967), 94. Cf. D. H. Farmer, *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints* (Oxford, 1978), 408.

⁴ G. Kristensson, *John Mirk's Instructions for Parish Priests*, Lund Studies in English 49 (Lund, 1974), 14.

⁵ Horstmann, op. cit., p. cxii.

⁶ Ibid., p. cxiii.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ *Concilia Magnae Britanniae et Hiberniae ab Anno MCCCCL ad Annum MDXLV*, III (London, 1737), 376-77.

⁹ Ibid., 234-36.

¹⁰ Ibid., 235.

¹¹ The evidence of Horstmann has not been questioned since it was made generally available by J. E. Wells, *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English 1050-1400* (New Haven, 1916), 301.

¹ C. Horstmann, *Altenglische Legenden*, Neue Folge (Heilbronn, 1881), p. cxi.